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ABSTRACT

Two of 4 junior high school counselors participated in in-service training in Systematic Counseling. The materials used in the training program were developed originally for use with the Michigan State University School Counselor Training Program. The approach of the counselors who did not participate in the training program was labeled Insight-Relationship Counseling. Teachers submitted names of students they identified as exhibiting low task-oriented behaviors. These students were randomly assigned to the counselors for 8 counseling interviews or to a no-contact control group. Each subject was assigned a task-oriented behavior rating based on evaluation of videotaped segments of his classroom behavior made following the counseling phase. Subjects assigned to the Systematic Counseling treatment increased their task oriented behavior significantly more often than did those assigned to the control group. No differences were found between the subjects assigned to the 2 counseling treatments. These findings support the conclusion that Systematic Counseling, as practiced after brief in-service training is a viable approach for helping students increase task-oriented behaviors. (Author/KS)

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EFFECT OF TWO COUNSELING TREATMENTS UPON THE TASK-ORIENTED BEHAVIOR OF SEVENTH GRADERS

By

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This study investigated the comparative effectiveness of three treatments upon the task-oriented behaviors of seventh grade subjects. The experimental conditions included two approaches to counseling. The first approach was Insight-Relationship Counseling as practiced by two experienced school counselors. The second was a matched pair of counselors who had participated in a brief in-service training program in Systematic Counseling. The third treatment was a no-contact control condition.

Four junior high school counselors who agreed to participate in the study were blocked on training and experience. One counselor from each block was selected by chance to receive training in Systematic Counseling. The training of the counselors selected was conducted in an in-service setting using teaching-learning units, flowcharts, and video-tape presentations originally developed for use with the Michigan State University School Counselor Training Program. The requirement that behavioral objectives be established by these counselors was emphasized throughout the training program.

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The approach used by counselors who were not trained in the systematic approach was labeled Insight-Relationship Counseling. This label was based on their responses to hypothetical counseling situations and questionnaire items concerning their counseling goals and procedures. These responses, provided by all participating counselors, were also used to determine that no marked differences existed in their individual approaches prior to the experiment.

Subjects for the experiment were randomly selected and assigned to counselors from lists of students identified by teachers as typically exhibiting either low or non-task oriented behaviors. The counselors who did not receive training in Systematic Counseling were informed that the goal and criterion variable for the experiment was an increase in task-oriented behaviors for the subjects involved and that they should continue their accustomed procedures in working with the subjects assigned to them.

Following the training phase the subjects participated in eight counseling interviews over a 10 week period. The tapes of these interviews were evaluated to determine that counselors who had received training in Systematic Counseling were, in fact, following this model and that behavioral objectives were established with all subjects assigned to these counselors. Tapes submitted by the Insight-Relationship counselors were evaluated to determine that they were not, in fact, using procedures that were unique to the Systematic Counseling model.

The counselors who followed the Insight-Relationship approach did not establish specific behavioral objectives with the subjects assigned to them. The interview activities of these counselors consisted primarily of providing encouragement to the clients and pointing out the possible consequences if the client failed to improve academically. Both Insight-Relationship counselors attempted to communicate the idea to their clients that a relationship existed between their classroom behavior and academic performance.

The subjects were video-taped in either their English or Social Studies classes for a total of 90 minutes both prior to and following the counseling phase. Each subject was assigned a Task-Oriented Behavior Rating based on evaluation of the video-tape segments of their classroom behavior. The following five-point scale used for the evaluation was a modification of a scale originally developed by Krumboltz and Goodwin (1966). (1) High Task-Orientation: The pupil reads, writes, figures, seeks assistance and/or information, and engages in other teacher determined activities. (2) Task-Orientation: The pupil prepares for work by getting out materials and/or arranging materials. (3) Neutral Behavior: Too few cues to permit a decision. This category was used when the subject was off-camera. (4) Non Task-Orientation: Pupil sits quietly, looks into space, plays with objects, stares at other pupils, and rocks back and forth in chair. (5) Low Task-Orientation: Pupil engages in horseplay, noise-making, talking to other pupils and other behavior that

clearly deviates from normal behavior in the classroom.

In addition to the Task-Oriented Behavior Rating, each subject was assigned a score on the following variables: (1) the relative rank they assigned themselves on task-oriented behaviors, and (2) the proportion of peers listing them as having improved.

The video-tape segments were shown to judges, all of whom were masters degree candidates in counseling, in a random order. The judges were instructed to classify the behavior of the subject, according to the above categories, as it occurred during each five second interval. Each subject was then assigned a Task-Oriented Behavior Rating according to the number of intervals in which each category of behavior was displayed.

Planned comparison techniques were used to compare the Systematic Counseling group with each of the two other groups. Since the comparisons were not orthogonal, it was necessary to split the overall alpha level of .10 between the two comparisons. Critical values therefore were set to establish significance at the .10 level throughout the study. The pilot study nature of this experiment and the small number of counselors participating led to the selection of the .10 alpha level, rather than the more traditional .05 or .01 levels. Preliminary examination of the data led to the decision to drop the pre-counseling Task-Oriented Behavior Rating as a covariate because of the low correlation between this variable and post-counseling measures. Random assignment of subjects was assumed to have equally

distributed pre-treatment differences among the groups.

No significant differences were found between the Systematic Counseling and the Insight-Relationship Counseling treatment on any of the measures. A significant difference, favoring the Systematic Counseling group, was found on the Task-Oriented Behavior Rating variable between the Systematic Counseling group and the no-contact control group. However, no differences between these two groups were found on the other variables.

The most important conclusion that can be derived from these findings is that Systematic Counseling is an effective approach for helping students improve their task-oriented behaviors. The counselors who received the brief training course in Systematic Counseling successfully applied the basic principles of this model in helping clients to make beneficial behavior changes.

While the results do not support the conclusion that Systematic Counseling is superior to Insight-Relationship Counseling in increasing the frequency of task-oriented behaviors, it can be pointed out that Systematic Counseling, as practiced by the counselors who received the training in this approach, was at least as effective as was the Insight-Relationship approach used by the other two counselors.

It should also be pointed out that the counselors who received training in Systematic Counseling were using this approach with the first client or clients following training in

this model. By contrast, those following the Insight-Relationship approach did no better using procedures they had followed with countless clients over their years of experience. The initial success experienced by the counselors who received this brief training indicates that continued practice and experience may well further enhance the effectiveness with which they use this model.

It is perhaps in the field of in-service training, however, that the results of this study will have the most far-reaching implications. The present investigation is among the first to report the effect of an in-service training program upon the subsequent behavior of clients. The training program used in this study is based upon teaching-learning units using well defined and integrated media and experiences. The program used is one that can be "packaged" and presented to a large number of practicing counselors in a variety of settings. The counselors in this study learned the principles of Systematic Counseling with a total instruction time of about twelve contact hours. A shorter training time might well be more effective.

One purpose of this study was to provide groundwork for future examinations of the Systematic Counseling model. While the differences were not significant, the mean task-oriented behavior rating of the subjects assigned to the Systematic Counseling treatment was higher than for those assigned to the Insight-Relationship Counseling treatment. This suggests that future research efforts might determine whether significant

differences exist between them. The following are some suggestions for future research efforts.

One possible endeavor would be to evaluate the effectiveness of different training models. Training programs following the one-day workshop format or formal graduate level courses could be used in training counselors in the principles of this counseling approach.

While establishment of objectives is crucial to the Systematic Counseling model, the effects of establishing behavioral objectives could be evaluated separately from other practices and procedures required by this model. Another area of investigation is the application of this model in group settings. With some behavior problems such as task-oriented behaviors that are common to many students, counselors might make more effective use of their time in group settings. Other research efforts might be directed toward determination of the differential effectiveness of the Systematic Counseling model with clients of different backgrounds and ability levels. Quite possible, this approach is more effective with some clients than with others.

While evidence is provided concerning the effectiveness of the Systematic Counseling approach with junior high school students, investigations should be conducted with populations ranging from elementary grades through college. Studies using such criterion measures as increased social interactions, study habits, and decision-making should also be conducted.